The Relationship between Philosophy and Theology in the Postmodern Age

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Can philosophy agree with theology? Study of philosophy by Western scholars and Muslim scholars. Metaphysics, epistemology, Christian theology, and postmodernism.

The Relationship between Philosophy and Theology in the Postmodern Age

Dr. Muhammad Legenhausen

When I was a student at a Catholic high school in Queens, New York, I was taught that although philosophy is the mother of the sciences, she is also the handmaid of theology. Sometimes the dialogue between philosophy and theology may have seemed to have taken the form of orders given by the theological mistress to her erudite but obedient maid, but that was a long time ago, if ever it was at all.

The idea that philosophy should be in service to theology has been rejected in the West by most philosophers, and many theologians, at least since the Enlightenment period of European thought. But instead of bringing about the emancipation of philosophy, the result has been to place philosophy at the service of her own children, the natural and human sciences. Scientific realists would determine being itself by the ultimate dictates of science.

So, where does this leave the relationship between philosophy and theology? Many see it as forever broken off, and many Christian theologians think that this is to the advantage of theology. As they see it, philosophy was never a very good servant, for .it was always raising more problems than it solved

Of course, this attitude is not unknown to Muslin scholars. It is

easy to find Muslims who are suspicious of philosophy; especially Islamic philosophy; there are even those, like Ghazali, who would accuse philosophy of blasphemy. Others would be satisfied if philosophy would mind its own business and stay out of .the way of theological doctrine

Philosophy, however, refuses to be ignored. It has a way of making itself noticed even by those theologians who wish it would just go away. Philosophy accuses those who neglect her of lacking reason, and since it proclaims that reason is the difference between man and the other animals, this accusation amounts to the charge that .those who neglect her are subhuman

So, after the rise and fall of positivism, after philosophy had been declared to be a servant of the natural sciences, assigned to clean up left over questions, philosophy arrives in the new dress of philosophy of religion, coyly proffering her own questions .for the theologian

On the surface, most or many of the questions are those which have been familiar to theologians for centuries: How can the existence of God be proved? How can God know what free humans will do? Can God make a stone so large that He Himself cannot lift it? How can the eternal God know the temporal material world? And so .forth

While on the surface, these appear to be the same questions familiar to theologians since reason was first applied to religion, once one becomes familiar with the contemporary discussions of these questions it becomes obvious that the philosophy

of religion is not as innocent as she may seem. Her questions are not those of a naive .girl seeking to understand her faith as best she can

Philosophy has served the sciences for years, and its servitude to the sciences has required countless compromises with humanism, materialism, physicalism, .naturalism, and other ideologies antagonistic to religion

When it raises its questions for the theologians, the arguments of all these ideologies are ready and waiting for whatever response the theologians may offer. If the theologian responds by rehearsing the standard discussions to be found in traditional texts, whether Christian or Islamic, he will be accused of -ignorance and irrelevance .to contemporary concerns

The philosophy of religion is by no means merely another name for rational theology as traditionally understood, for the very standards of reason which are applied to theological issues have changed. If the theologian is not to be caught off guard, he must be prepared to question these standards, and thus, to adopt an unfamiliar .hypercritical stance toward the cannons of reason themselves

The dialogue between philosophy and theology today is not simply an affair between the questioning mind of the philosopher and the pious spirit of the theologian. Every question comes with unspoken expectations of what sort of answer will be considered suitable. Every search for a reason presupposes a standard of explanation. The expectations and presuppositions which inform the philosophy of religion are deeply .coloured by the entire history of recent Western thought

Since many of those who write

and publish in the area of philosophy of religion have been trained in analytic philosophy, the standards of analytic philosophy, which are influenced to a great degree by positivism, pragmatism, and the thinking of natural scientists, play an .important but subtle role in this field

The situation is complicated by the fact that many philosophers -of religion, and even more Christian theologians, are influenced more by what is often called "continental philosophy" than by analytic philosophy. Most of the important continental philosophers have been from France or Germany, while the majority of analytic .philosophers have taught at American or British universities

While philosophy in the U.S. has been dominated by analytic thought throughout, most of the twentieth century, over the last ten or fifteen years, continental thought has come to play a prominent role in American philosophy. What is emerging is a "world philosophy," but one from which the Islamic world is largely excluded. The reason for this exclusion is not because of some conspiracy to suppress Islamic thought, but .because we Muslims have not seriously attempted to enter the discussion

If we are to enter the discussion, we must beware that it takes place in what is often hostile territory, in the context of expectations, presuppositions and standards of .reasoning many of which are quite foreign to those found in the Islamic sciences

These issues must be kept in mind before the Muslim scholar attempts to survey the questions contemporary philosophy of religion poses for theology, where here, and in what

follows, theology is to be understood as including not merely kalam, but `irfan nazari .(theoretical gnosis), religious ethics, and even some discussions of fiqh and usul

What appears to be a dialogue between a philosopher who relies on pure reason alone and a theologian is in reality a complex discussion about philosophy, the sciences, theology and the various ideologies which have influenced these broad .areas of intellectual endeavor

Perhaps the attitude of the Muslim scholar to the complexity of the situation will be one of dismissal: The philosophy of religion is the product of Western intellectual attitudes toward science and religion and does not apply to the Islamic world. The conversation between philosophy and theology is really a conversation between a .Western philosopher and a Christian theologian

However, we ignore the philosophy of religion at our own peril. The ideas and attitudes that inform the philosophy of religion are not confined within the walls of a few universities in distant foreign lands. They are part of the Western cultural atmosphere whose volume is so large that it will find itself invading the Islamic world, .or rather has already started invading, whether anyone wants it to or not

The international commerce in ideas-mostly Western ideas--cannot be slowed, let alone stopped. Faced with a trade imbalance, attempts may be made to preserve local markets, but ultimately the only successful policy will be one in which locally .manufactured products of export quality are made widely available

Since there are so many different kinds of

Western intellectual products on the market, we Muslims cannot hope to gain our market share in all fields any time soon. However, we can hope to compete aggressively in those areas in which Islamic thought has demonstrated its strength in .the past, and build on this to expand into other areas

In order to compete in the international market of ideas, Islamic thought must not only answer the doubts raised by various Western thinkers, it must do so in a way that is distinctively Islamic. We cannot simply look at the answers Christians have given and then search for an appropriate ,had'ith to make them seem Islamic. Serious full time work has to be done to begin to formulate contemporary Islamic theologies which are in harmony with the tradition of Islamic sciences, especially kalam, falsafah, .and `irfan

With these points in mind, we can turn to some examples of the sorts of questions .raised by the philosophy of religion for the theologian

One of the deepest areas to be surveyed is that of epistemology. This is also an area to which medieval thinkers devoted less attention than our contemporaries. How do ?we know that God exists

The traditional answer given by Christians as well as Muslims was that we can formulate sound deductive proofs whose premises are self-evident and whose conclusions state the existence of God. The problem with this answer is that many of the premises which seemed self-evident enough in the past have now come to be .questioned

,Consider, for example

the role of the principle that an actual infinity of causes is impossible. A number of Western philosophers, physicists and mathematicians have come to doubt this principle. In defense of the principle, an important book has been written in which some of the ideas of Muslim philosophers are given attention: William Lane Craig's .(The Kalam Cosmological Argument (New York: Harper Row, ۱۹۷۹

This is one of the rare cases in which ideas from the Islamic tradition (particularly those of Abu Humid Ghazali) have been the subject of discussion in the contemporary philosophy of religion. The continued discussion of this work in scholarly journals .sixteen years after the publication of the book is testimony to its significance

The important point is that what has seemed for centuries to be a self-evident principle is now the topic of vigorous debate. At first glance it seems that what we have here is a case of a principle of reason defended in Islamic philosophy and .theology pitted against the modem skeptics of the West

If we look closer, however, we find that the principle has undergone its own evolution within the tradition of Islamic philosophy. By the time we get to Sadr al-Muta'allihin the principle is limited to series of actual causes of existence occurring .simultaneously

The question that needs to be addressed here is how the unqualified principle came to be qualified in Islamic philosophy, for the unqualified principle was also taken by some (such as Ghazali) to be a self-evident principle

of reason, and the version of the principle stilt defended by Craig is not subject to the !qualification of simultaneity

In any case, what we find here is rather typical of the philosophy of religion. Philosophers impressed with the principles employed in the natural sciences or mathematics raise doubts about what had been considered to be self-evident or nearly self-evident principles which had been used as premises of proofs for the existence of God. The result is an epistemological problem.

What was once claimed to be known is now doubted. The doubts raised are not unanswerable, but the formulation of answers requires a fair degree of sophistication, including a certain amount of familiarity with current physics and mathematics. The debate about the cosmological argument and the new physics is taken up by William Lane Craig and Quentin Smith in a more recent book: Theism, Atheism and Big Bang Cosmology (New York: Oxford, ۱۹۹۳).

Debates about the traditional proofs for the existence of God have led some to question whether proofs are really necessary at all for rational, religious belief. Alvin Plantinga has become famous among philosophers of religion for his defense of what he calls "reformed epistemology."(۱)

Plantinga claims that for the devout Christian, belief in the existence of God is properly basic, that is, it doesn't need to be proved. He claims that the founder of the Reformed Church, John Calvin, held a similar view(۲) Calvin was skeptical about the abilities of sinful man to reason his way to the existence

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۱- Plantinga's articles on this topic have not yet been collected in the form of a book, but two anthologies in which there are articles by him and discussions of his work are especially worth mentioning: Robert Audi and William J. Wainwright, eds., Rationality, Religious Belief, and Moral Commitment (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, ۱۹۸۶), and Alvin Plantinga and Nicholas Wolterstorff', eds., Faith and Rationality: Reason and Belief in God (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, ۱۹۸۳). Also worth

mentioning is a book devoted to criticisms of Plantinga's ideas and his responses: James E. Tomberlin and Peter Van Inwagen, Alvin Plantinga, Profiles, Volume ۵ .((Dordrecht: D. Reidel,۱۹۸۵

Plantinga's claim has been disputed by John Beversluis, who argues that Calvin and -۲ the Reformed Church object to natural theology for reason incompatible with the epistemological position advocated by Plantinga. See John Beversluis, "Reforming the `Reformed' Objection to Natural Theology," Faith and Philosophy, ۱۲:۲, April ۱۹۹۵, ۱۸۹-.۲۰۶

of God, but Catholic philosophers, who have more faith in human reason, have also been impressed with Plantinga's position.

The Catholic response to Plantinga is especially interesting because in the Shi'i tradition there has been a similar respect for the powers of reason. I suspect that in the long run, the responses of Catholic and Muslim philosophers and theologians will be similar in being diverse.(۱)

Some of the Catholic thinkers who have researched the issue have defended a foundationalist epistemology, but the majority have sought to find some common ground with the sort of view defended by Plantinga. Another major figure who has defended the rationality of religious belief without reliance on the traditional proofs for the existence of God is William Alston.(۲)

Alston turns modem skepticism against atheism, claiming that we have no more reason to trust sense experience than we have to trust our religious intuitions. Since the beliefs based on sense experience are considered to be rational, the same must be granted of religious beliefs.

Alston's work, like Plantinga's, has generated volumes of criticism and responses, most of which focus on such epistemological questions as the nature of knowledge and rationality, faith and belief, or evidence and justification.

Other defenders of the Christian faith have argued that the doubts raised by Hume (۱۷۱۱-۱۷۷۶) and Kant (۱۷۲۴-۱۸۰۴) about the rationality of religious belief can be answered through an examination of the standards of reasoning employed in the natural sciences today, which are far from what Hume and Kant imagined.(۳)

۱- See Rational Faith: Catholic Responses to Reformed Epistemology, edited by Linda Zagzebski (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, ۱۹۹۳).

۲- His major work on this topic is Perceiving God: The Epistemology of Religious Experience (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, ۱۹۹۱).

See Michael C. Banner, The Justification of Science and the Rationality of Religious -٣
Belief (Oxford: Oxford University Press; ١٩٩٢) and Nancey Murphy, Theology in the Age
.(of Scientific Reasoning (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, ١٩٩٠

In these discussions it is the philosophy of science to which theologians must turn in order to demonstrate to those who have faith in science but not in religion that their bias is not dictated by their fidelity to the rational standards of the empirical sciences.

In many of the discussions of the rationality of religious faith, the concept of religious experience plays a pivotal role. This is especially true of the writings of reformed epistemologists and of William Alston, but of many others as well, including Gary Gutting,(۱) Richard Swinbume(۲) and Jolu۱ Hick.(۳)

The concept of religious experience is one which is especially foreign to Islamic thought, for it emerged in Europe and the United States in the writings of Friedrich Schleiermacher and William fames as a result of the pressure religious thinkers felt exerted by the legacies of Hume and Kant, romanticism and empiricism.

Even the very term "religious experience" is difficult to translate into Farsi or Arabic. The most commonly accepted translation seems to be tajrobeh ye dini, but tajrobeh has the odour of the laboratory and a sense of repetition which is absent from the Western concept. Other terms which might be suggested each have their own problems, for example, idrak, shenakht, and marifat each are appropriate only when some reality is successfully apprehended, while the term "religious experience" is supposed to be neutral as to whether it is illusory or veridical.

It is to be understood on analogy with scientific data, and just as the scientist

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۱- Gary Gutting, Religious Belief and Religious Skepticism (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, ۱۹۸۲).

۲- Richard Swinburne, The Existence of God (London: Oxford University Press, ۱۹۷۹).

۳- John Hick, An Interpretation of Religion (New Haven: Yale University Press, ۱۹۸۹).

uses reason to judge which of competing hypotheses can best explain the available empirical data, Gary Gutting and Richard Swinbume hold that the hypothesis of God's existence can best explain the data of one's inner religious feelings and intuitions.

Alston and Plantinga, on the other hand, claim that for the believer, the proposition that God exists is more analogous to the scientist's presumption that there is a physical world to be investigated and about which empirical data convey information. They hold that religious feeling and intuitions, including mystical visions, provide data which convey information about God and His relation to the believer, information which presupposes the existence of God.

To say that according to Alston and Plantings religious experience presupposes the existence of God sloes not mean that for these philosophers God's existence is a mere assumption, for they hold that the assumption is warranted, and that its warrant can be demonstrated through a rational examination of the relation between the assumption and the sorts of religious experiences that are important to Christian life.

The focus on religious experience has led some philosophers, such as William Proudfoot,(١) Steven Katz(٢) and Nelson Pike,(٣) to an epistemological examination of the reports of the mystics. They ask such questions as whether a meaningful distinction can be made between what appears in the heart of the mystic and how he interprets this appearance, whether mystical appearances must be analogous to sensory appearances, whether mystics of various traditions all have the same sorts of experiences, whether

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١- Wayne Proudfoot, Religious Experience (Berkeley: University of California Press, ١٩٨٥).

٢- Steven Katz, ed., Mysticism and Philosophical Analysis (New York: Oxford University Press, ١٩٧٨).

٣- Nelson Pike, Mystic Union: An Essay on the Phenomenology of Mysticism (Ithaca:

.(Cornell University Press, ١٩٩٢

training determines the sort of experience the mystic will have and whether the .mystics themselves take these experiences to have epistemological significance

Here we find a number of issues about which the philosopher and the theologian can be of mutual service. The theologian provides the philosopher with the doctrinal setting in terms of which reports of mystical experiences are understood, and the philosopher provides a critical analysis of both doctrine and report in order to place .mystical experiences within the framework of a broader epistemological theory

It is not only epistemology that serves as a source of the problems posed in the philosophy of religion for theology, virtually all the branches of philosophy have some .bearing on the philosophy of religion, anti raise questions about theological doctrine

One of the most distinguished areas of philosophy is metaphysics, and metaphysics has long had an intimate relation to theology, especially to Islamic theosophy (hikmat). Muslim, Christian and Jewish theologians have often utilized metaphysical .systems based on ancient Greek thought in order to explain theological doctrines

Many religious philosophers have come to prefer other systems of metaphysics; as a result, they find themselves engaged in an attempt to restate religious doctrine in a .way that does not use the language of the older metaphysics

Sometimes, however, doctrine becomes so intertwined with the older metaphysics that they are difficult to separate. For example, the Christian doctrine of the Trinity was stated in terms of metaphysics of substances, modes, persons and attributes drawn from Roman as well

.as Greek philosophy

Many contemporary Christian thinkers are now willing to concede that the traditional statements of the doctrine of the Trinity in these terms have not been successful. But rather than reject the claim that God is to be understood as the Holy Trinity, they have claimed that the doctrine is better explained without the claim that God is three persons but one substance, or with an interpretation of this claim that would have .been unthinkable in past centuries

Robert Cummings Neville, the Dean of the Boston Theological Seminary, completely dismisses the claim, and defends the Trinity as three ways or aspects of divinity understood with reference to the creation. God is the source of creation; He is the end or telos of creation, and He is the very activity of creation itself, according to Neville. Aside from this, there is little left of the traditional doctrine of the Trinity in Neville's (theology.(۱

A more traditional defense of the Trinity is to be found in the work of a philosopher who teaches at Notre Dame University in Indiana, Thomas V Morris. Morris uses the methods developed by analytic philosophers to defend a version of Social Trinitarianism from the heretical claim made by some process theologians that God is in need of the world. Process theology itself developed as a reaction against a metaphysics of substances inspired by Whitehead and Hartshome's idea that the (world consists of essentially interrelated events.(۲

Another contemporary metaphysical idea which has had an impact on discussions

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.(Robert Cummings Neville, A TheologyPrimer (Albany: SUNY, ۱۹۹۱ -۱

See Thomas V Morris, The Logic of God Incarnate (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, -۲ .(۱۹۸۶

of the doctrine of the Trinity is the theory of relative identity. According to this idea the identity relation is always governed by the category of its terms. Defenders of the Trinity such as Peter Geach and Peter van Inwagen have used the theory of relative identity to defend the proposition that while the persons of the Trinity may be (different persons, they may at the same time be the same God.(۱)

Other areas to which philosophers of religion have applied ideas drawn from contemporary logic and metaphysics include discussions of Anselm's ontological argument for the existence of God, the many problems pertaining to the divine attributes, the nature of divine activity, God's foreknowledge and human .responsibility, the nature of creation ex nihilo and the problem of evil

Older than epistemology and at least as ancient as metaphysics is ethics. Philosophical reflections on good and evil, right and wrong and virtue and vice have always mingled with religious thought, and today, as well, philosophers whose primary concern is the nature of value and morality are raising important questions .for theologians to ponder

All of the religions systematize moral thought to a certain extent, for all religions issue imperatives disobedience to which is considered morally as well as religiously wrong. Must moral theory conform to the moral concepts embodied in religion? Can there be altruistic ideals that go beyond the moral ideals of religion? Can religion issue orders which nullify moral imperatives? Can a person be morally reprehensible without violating any religious

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۱- See Peter Geach, The Virtues (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, ۱۹۷۷), and Peter van Inwagen, “And Yet They Are Not Three Gods But One God,” in Thomas V Morris, ed., Philosophy and the Christian Faith (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame .Press, ۱۹۸۸), pp. ۲۴۱-۲۷۸

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Can a rational ethics put constraints on an acceptable interpretation of religion? How could God, who is perfectly good, order Abraham to kill his son? This last question was forcefully raised by Soren Kierkegaard (۱۸۱۳-۱۸۸۵), and it is still a problem frequently .discussed among Christian philosophers and theologians

Kierkegaard's answer, of course, was that religion issues orders with a force beyond anything found in morality, orders which from the point of view of reason would be considered wrong. Philosophers and theologians who are not satisfied with this fideist approach to religious commands must find a plausible reconciliation between reason and moral intuition, on the one hand, and religious rulings and actions of those .considered faultless, on the other

The question of the relation between divine commands and moral imperatives has become the focus of considerable debate among contemporary philosophers of religion largely as a result of the work of Robert M. Adams.(۱) In his articles on divine command theories of morality, Adams has sought to reconcile the idea that actions are wrong or right because they are forbidden or commanded by God with the idea .that God's commands are not arbitrary

Adams is no Ash`arite, and will not accept the claim that if God were to command cruelty and infidelity then torture and treason would be morally praiseworthy. God's commands have moral force, according to Adams, only because God is perfectly good, just and benevolent; but without God's commands, Adams contends there .would be no moral imperatives at all

Other recent publications

۱- Robert Adams, `A Modified Divine Command Theory of Ethical Wrongness" in Louis Pojman, ed., Philosophy of Religion (Belmont: Wadsworth Publishing Company, ۱۹۸۷), and "Divine Command Metaethics Modified Again" The Journal of Religious Ethics ۱:۷,

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in which the relation between religion and morality are discussed include J. L. Mackie's The Miracle of Theism(۱) and many of the writings of Alasdair MacIntyre.(۲) Mackie argues as an admitted atheist that the only ways to make sense of the relation between fact and value is either through Hume's moral philosophy or through a .religious theory

He even confesses that if no variation on Hume's theory is ultimately defensible, we should be forced to seek a religious explanation to the manner in which values seem .to supervene on natural properties

MacIntyre is also interested in the fact/value dichotomy, and he explicitly seeks to refute Hume's approach to the problem, and to refute most other modem theorists as well. But MacIntyre is not satisfied with the notion that facts are related to values by divine decree; instead he seeks to revive a version of an Aristotelian teleological ethics, but one in which perfection is to be understood by means of attention to the movement of tradition and historical narrative, rather than through biology (as .(Aristotle sometimes seemed to suggest

Religion becomes paramount in MacIntyre's thinking because it is only religion which is able to support the sorts of traditions and historical narratives which can provide a .firm basis for the moral life

No discussion of the way religious narratives can contribute to our understanding of who we are and where we are headed would be complete without some attention to the issue of religious language, and this brings us to another

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.(J. L. Mackie, The Miracle of Theism (New York: Oxford University Press, ۱۹۸۲ -۱

MacIntyre's most important books are After Virtue, ۲nd ed. (Notre Dame: University -۲ of Notre Dame Press, ۱۹۸۴), Whose Justice? Which Rationality? (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, ۱۹۸۸), and Three Rival Versions of Moral Enquiry: Encyclopedia, Geneology and Tradition (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, ۱۹۹۰). Translations of the first two of these works into Farsi are being prepared, and a

Farsi summary of After Virtue may be found in the journal Ma'rifat, Nos. ۹-۱۸, and .continuing

.area in which the philosopher may be seen as posing questions for the theologian

One of the areas of most intense activity in twentieth century Western philosophy is that of the philosophy of language. The German mathematician, logician and philosopher Gottlob Frege (۱۸۴۸-۱۹۲۵) initiated a research program in the philosophy. of language concerned with such problems as sense and reference, the failure of substitution of co-referential terms in various 'intentional' contexts (for example, it, may be true that S believes that a is F and true that a= b, although S fails to believe that b is F), and the logical analysis of various sorts of semantic functions commonly performed in ordinary language by demonstratives, proper names, definite .descriptions, and other kinds of terms and expressions

Frege's programme was carried on by Russell (۱۸۷۲-۱۹۷۰), Wittgenstein (۱۸۸۹-۱۹۵۱), Camap (۱۸۹۱-۱۹۷۰), Quine (۱۹۰۸-) and Kripke (۱۹۴۰-), to mention just a few of those .whose ideas about the logical analysis of language have provoked extended debate

The program of logical analysis was soon extended to theological statements. Philosophers of religion began to ask questions about the logical analysis of such claims as "God is eternal"(۱) and "God is omnipotent,"(۲) and the ways in which we may (succeed in referring to God.(۳

Although these discussions may be fruitfully compared to medieval .discussions of related issues in Islamic as well as Christian theology and philosophy, many contemporary Christian theologians find the attention to logical detail a bit boring, and .irrelevant to their primary concerns

Many

۱- See, for example, Eleonore Stump and Norman Kretzmann, "Eternity" in Thomas V .(Morris, ed., The Concept ofGod (Oxford: Oxford University Press, ۱۹۸۷

۲- See the articles in Linwood Urban and Douglas N. Walton, eds., The Power of God .((New York: Oxford University Press, ۱۹۷۸

٣ - See William P Alston's, “Referring to God,” in his Divine Nature and Human Language: Essays in Philosophical Theology (Ithaca: Comell University Press, ١٩٨٩).

of these theologians have been more favourably impressed by Wittgenstein's later writings, and his suggestion that religious language may be compared to a game or a form of life significantly different from scientific language to prevent the possibility of any conflict between religion and science.(۱)

Wittgenstein's doctrine of language games also has attracted theologians who sought a response to the positivists' charge that religious claims were meaningless. Although the verificationist theory of meaning advocated by the positivists has been generally rejected, the Wittgensteinian slogan, "meaning is use," provided theologians with a basis in the philosophy of language for turning their attention to functionalist theories of religious language which seemed to dovetail rather neatly with the anti-reductionism popular in Protestant theological circles.

These theologians felt that any attempt to base religious claims on theoretical reason (as in the traditional proofs for the existence of God, called natural theology), or on practical reason (as in Kant's theology), ought to be rejected as reductions of religious claims to metaphysics or ethics, reductions which failed to appreciate the fundamental originality of the religious view, what Schleiennacher (۱۷۶۸-۱۸۳۴) called the religious moment of experience.

These tendencies among many (although by no means all) of those who have been attracted to functionalist explanations of religious language are largely anti-philosophical tendencies, even when they turn to the philosophy of the later Wittgenstein for support.

Although there are many disagreements among those who find themselves supporting some variety of fideism, there is agreement among the fideists that religion does

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۱- See D. Z. Phillips, Religion Without Explanation (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, ۱۹۷۶) and Norman -Malcolm, Wittgenstein: A Religious Point of View? (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, ۱۹۹۴).

.not need any philosophical explanation or justification

So, after our tour through the philosophical territories bordering on theology, we find ourselves back where we started, at epistemology and the question of the rationality of religious belief, for functionalist approaches to religious language, including theories according to which religious language serves to express attitudes rather than to describe reality, are often attempts to escape rational criticism of religious beliefs. No justification is needed, the fideist proclaims, because the language of .religion is independent of and irrelevant to the language of justification

Here the reformed epistemology of Alvin Plantinga, or the related ideas of William Alston may be seen as a sort of compromise between those who would justify religious claims by rational proof and those who deny that any such justification is needed or desirable. What Plantinga and Alston offer is a philosophical argument as to why religious belief may be considered warranted and rational, even in the absence .of direct evidential support

Today's Christian theologians, however, are often unimpressed by the works of Christian philosophers such as those mentioned above. These philosophers are primarily concerned with the issues of rationality and the justification or warrant that .can or cannot be provided for assertions of the truth of various- religious claims

The theologians, on the other hand, often seem to be more interested in the effects in the lives of believers which are associated with adhering to various beliefs and participating in the Church. Religion is not a collection of truths about God, they

.insist, but a way to salvation

Religious symbols are important for many contemporary Christian theologians not as they serve to disclose religious truths which might not be expressible in non-symbolic language, but rather because they present a framework within which meaning for human life is to be found.(۱)

Another reason Christian theologians have given for their antipathy toward philosophy is related to the problem of religious pluralism. In the past, Christian theologians claimed that the doctrines of Christianity were true, and that all those .doctrines inconsistent with Christian dogma were false

Among the dogmas of traditional Christianity is the claim that there is only one way to salvation for Catholics, the Church, and for Protestants, participation in Christ's redemption of sin by faith. In short, traditional Christianity would exclude Jews, Muslims, Hindus and Buddhists from salvation and eternal felicity unless they would .accept Christianity on learning of its gospel

As Christians are becoming increasingly aware that there are good people, even saintly people, who follow a path other than that of Christianity although they are familiar with the gospel, they are finding it difficult to accept the traditional dogma that would bar the non-Christian from paradise. A number of Christian theologians are even beginning to take the view that Christian theology has been too preoccupied .with the truth of dogma altogether

In reaction to the exclusivism of traditional Christianity, according to which the acceptance of certain truth-claims is a necessary condition for salvation, some have gone to the extreme of

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۱ - See Gordon Kaufinan, "Evidentialism: A Theologian's Response," Faith and Philosophy, ۶:۱ (January ۱۹۸۹), ۳۵-۴۶, and the response by Eleonore Stump and Norman Kretzmann, "Theologically Unfashionable Philosophy," Faith and Philosophy, ۷:۳ (July

۱۹۹۰), ۳۲۹-۳۳۹, and the defense of Kaufinan's position by James A. Keller, "On the Issues Dividing Contemporary Christian Philosophers and Theologians," Faith and Philosophy, ۱۰:۱ (January ۱۹۹۳), ۶۸-۷۸ and James A. Keller, "Should Christian Theologians become Christian Philosophers?" Faith and Philosophy, ۱۲:۲ (April ۱۹۹۵), ۲۶۰-۲۶۸.

thinking that the truth of religious doctrines is insignificant, and attempts to justify .religious beliefs or show them to be rational are irrelevant to the issue of salvation

Instead of occupying themselves with the central questions of traditional theology, constructing proofs to support doctrines, analyzing the logical structure of various religious concepts, and defending their interpretation of doctrines against rivals, many if not most contemporary Christian theologians have turned their attention to questions about how religious concepts develop and change, how they function in religious communities, how religious ideas inform religious experience, and how Christian symbols, practices and institutions have been used and abused by Christian .communities in various historical and social contexts

When these theologians turn their attention to questions of ethics, they are concerned about how to prevent the future abuse of Christian symbols, practices and institutions and how to encourage what they consider to be the positive and morally responsible development of the various elements of Christian life, although there is often a lack of critical reflection on the philosophical perspective which informs their own moral standards. Many believe that claims to have religious knowledge or certainty reflect a sinful desire to gain intellectual control over what must remain .ultimately a mystery

Today's Christian theologians are much more interested in postmodernist thought than the work- of Christian philosophers trained in the analytic tradition. Postmodernism is a movement which has emerged from the ideas of certain contemporary French writers such as Jean-Francois Lyotard,(۱) Jacques Derrida,(۲) (Georges Bataille,(۳) and Michel Foucault.(۴

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۱ - Jean-Francois Lyotard, tr. G. Bennington and B. Massumi, The Postmodern .(Condition (Minneapolis: Minnesota University Press, ۱۹۸۴

۲ - His major work is Of Grammatology, tr. G. Spivak (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, ۱۹۷۴), but especially relevant to contemporary Christian theology is

Derrida and Negative Theology, ed. Harold Coward and Toby Foshay (Albany: SUNY Press, ١٩٩٢).

٣- Georges Bataille, Theory of Religion, tr. R. Hurley (New York: Zone Books, ١٩٨٩).

٤ - Michel Foucault, The Archaeology of Knowledge, ti. A. M. Sheridan-Snuth (New York: Harper Row, ١٩٧٢), also see the biography, James Miller, The Passion of Michel Foucault (New York: Simon Schuster, ١٩٩٣) in which the relation between Foucault's writings and his sado-masochistic homosexuality is explored.

What these writers have in common is a generally cynical outlook, skepticism about the transcendental claims characteristic of the modem period of European philosophy from Descartes (۱۵۹۶-۱۶۵۰) through Kant (۱۷۲۴-۱۸۰۴), the suspicion that rational argument is a screen hiding desires for power, the idea that we cannot escape the cultural presuppositions which largely determine our world view, and an irreverent .style. Many of the postmodernists look to Nietzsche (۱۸۴۴-۱۹۰۰) for inspiration

Contemporary Christian theologians, who are reluctant to defend or try to justify Christian doctrine, some of whom even admit agnosticism; find common cause with the postmodernists.(۱) Postmodernist writings do not really offer the theologian a set of philosophical questions of relevance to theology as we found with the philosophy of religion. Instead, the postmodernist offers consolation to the fideist theologian for his reluctance to attempt to show that his beliefs are reasonable and excuses for not .engaging in the reasoned defense of the truth of his beliefs

Postmodernism is not a philosophy, but an intellectual movement against philosophy as traditionally understood. Traditionally, the term philosophy functions as an .encomium-it is not merely descriptive, but has a strong evaluative sense

To imply that postmodernist thought is not philosophy, but anti-philosophy, is to express allegiance to the traditional ideal of philosophy as love of sophia, as a quest for the truth which the postmodernists find somewhat preposterous. In castigating postmodernism as anti-philosophy; however; I do not mean to be dismissive. Postmodernism is a very important trend which has had a profound influence

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۱ - For a collection of essays in which postmodernist thought is seen as offering resources for Christian theology see Faith and Philosophy, Vol. ۱۰, No. ۴ (October ۱۹۹۳).

(on many Christian theologians.(١)

The philosophy of religion as practiced by Christian philosophers with training in analytic philosophy may be understood as a movement which to a large extent is diametrically opposed to postmodernism. To the postmodemists, the Christian philosophers seem a bit naive-still arguing about how to defend the rationality of .asserting the truth of various religious doctrines

To the philosopher, however, what room remains for religion in the confines of postmodernism is little more than a sentimental attachment to the symbols and rituals of religion shorn of the metaphysical or transcendent significance which gives them their power and is responsible for the strong emotional response they provoke .in the first place

This is a claim. I suspect that most of my readers will agree with it, and that we do not have to look very far to find arguments to back it up. The claim is that the strength of the hold on the human imagination exerted by religion as evidenced by phenomena as diverse as the Islamic Revolution in Iran and allusions to religious themes in contemporary American fiction depends on the fact that religions allege that they contain truths that are absolute, truths that go beyond the particularities of their .expressions in various cultural contexts

The questions of whether or not this allegation is correct, and whether it is even rational to believe it, are central to contemporary discussions of the philosophy of religion. For this reason alone, the skepticism of the postmodernist is important and requires a

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١ - Postmodernism is also starting to attract the attention of students of Islamic thought. See Akbar S. Ahmed, Postmodernism and Islam: Predicament and Promise (London: Routledge, ١٩٩٢) and Ernest Gellner, Postmodernism, Reason and Religion .((London: Routledge,١٩٩٢

.response

But aside from how this response is formulated, there is this other question of whether postmodernism can provide a philosophical perspective from which theology is more profoundly understood or whether it undermines theology by denying that it has any real connection with Ultimate Reality The Christian postmodemists and many, if not the majority, of contemporary Christian theologians contend that the question of the truth of religious doctrine can be dismissed without damage to religion, at least without damage to Protestant Christianity, because the focus of the evangelical's .religion is salvation rather than gnosis

This contention is dubious for several reasons. First, because the vast majority of believers, past and present, of the world's religions have understood their religions as making important claims about reality. Any denial of the importance of religious truth .is a distortion of religious thought

Second, in Islam and Christianity, the Ultimate Reality is known as God, and the practical, symbolic and social dimensions of religious life are directed toward obedience and worship of God as the means to salvation. If claims that God exists are dismissed as naive, then the doubts generated about the reality of the object of worship threaten to make the meaningfulness of worship doubtful. Without God, .worship is pointless, and without meaningful worship, there is no salvation

Third, the aura of the sacred and feelings of holiness generated by religion seem to involve the idea that the sacred provides us with a vehicle by means of which the mundane is to be

transcended, the merely perspectival is to be escaped. In revealed religion, particular historical events are designated as revelation, and with this designation Christians and Muslims cease to see Jesus, Peace be with him, as a merely historical personality, and Muslims cease to see the Qur'an al-Karim as a mere artifact of early medieval .Arabian culture, but as the Word of God

This transformation of awareness from the mundane to the sacred is accomplished by means of a recognition of an ontological status for the Source of revelation, so that without the metaphysical dimension of religion, the rest of it, including the salvific potency of its symbols, the feelings of obligation to respect its commandments, the attachment to participation in its rituals, all would weaken and wither.(۱)

The above discussion of postmodernism prepares the way for a return to our original question about the relation of philosophy to theology. Despite the fact that religious authorities might feel threatened from time to time by questions that arise out of unfamiliar philosophical discussions, many of whose participants are indeed hostile toward religious authority, if not toward religion itself, ultimately the theologian .cannot escape an involvement with philosophy

Perhaps the most persuasive reason we can offer to the theologian is that the philosophical criticisms of religious ideas that plague the minds of the young require a philosophical response if the young are to be guided. Even if no amount of merely philosophical expertise will be sufficient to remove doubt, some philosophical wisdom is necessary

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۱ - Worthy of note is Huston Smith's defense of the religious world view over the postmodern proclamation (issued by Richard Rorty) that "There is no Big Picture:" "Postmodernism and the World's Religions" in The Truth about Truth, ed., Walter Truett Anderson (Los Angeles: Jeremey P Tarcher, ۱۹۹۵), an address originally delivered in Kuala Lumpur for a symposium on "Islam and the Challenge of Modernity," and later revised without references to Islam as "The Religious

Significance of Postmodernism: A Rejoinder" in Faith and Philosophy ۱۲:۳ (July ۱۹۹۵), ۴۰۹-۴۲۲.

in order to engage the sincere seeker in the spiritual work of rising above the .widespread Satanic suspicions that religion is little more than a pack of lies

The presence of philosophical doubts in the minds of the young was also the reason given by Allamah Tabataba'i to Ayatullah Burujerdi for publicly teaching philosophy in Qum. Philosophy presents itself to theology as a servant without whose help the mess !philosophy herself has made cannot be cleaned up

But there are other reasons for theology to graciously accept the services offered by philosophy. Allah has graced the human mind with a thirst for wisdom, and the wisdom sought includes knowledge of the things of which religion speaks, as well as skill in practical evaluations and the sort of precision in which logicians, mathematicians and physicists take pride, and other things, such as history, as well. The philosophical quest is one which propels the seeker to some degree of .understanding of all these areas and an attempt to fit them together

From time to time philosophy might devote too much attention to a single dimension of understanding, resulting in waves of logicism or empiricism or historicism, but the structure of the human spirit ultimately cannot be satisfied with a narrow slot from which to view reality. I am told that Sohravardi Maqtul said that a person who is not able to leave his body at will is not a real philosopher. I am not sure what this means, but it suggests to me

the philosophical need to escape the confines of a physical perspective, the need to succumb to what some have derided as "the transcendental temptation."(۱)

Theology, on the other hand, is much more limited than philosophy. The business of theology is not to offer a comprehensive theory of reality, but merely to show that there is a Supreme Reality and how this is related to lesser things.

Without some attention to philosophy, the business of theology is not likely to be very profitable, because we do not get a very clear picture of God's relation to the world unless we pay some attention to what the world is supposed to look like. This does not mean that theology has to give an absolute stamp of approval to some particular metaphysical speculation, but theologians should not shy away from metaphysical issues either.

Theology is well served by philosophy if it interacts with philosophical ideas without developing a dependency for a single philosophical way of doing things. Philosophy, too, perhaps finds its true vocation in service to theology.

For if philosophy is to fulfill its goal of providing an intelligible comprehensive synthesis, it must make room for theological truth and knowledge of that truth, that is, by providing for the needs of theology. This becomes the worship of philosophy, to be at the service of theology; and as in all things human, the highest degree of perfection is to be approached through worship of Allah, recognizing one's own faqr before al-Ghani.

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۱ - See the defense of atheistic skepticism by Paul Kurtz, The Transcendental Temptation (New York: Prometheus, ۱۹۸۶).

About center

In the name of Allah

هَلْيَسْتَوِيالَّذِينَيَعْلَمُونَوَالَّذِينَلَايَعْلَمُونَ

?Are those who know equal to those who do not know

al-Zumar: ٩

:Introduction

Ghaemiyeh Computer Research Institute of Isfahan, from ٢٠٠٧, under the authority of Ayatollah Haj SayyedHasanFaqihImami (God blesses his soul), by sincere and daily efforts of university and seminary elites and sophisticated groups began its activities .in religious, cultural and scientific fields

:Manifesto

Ghaemiyeh Computer Research Institute of Isfahan in order to facilitate and accelerate the accessibility of researchers to the books and tools of research, in the field of Islamic science, and regarding the multiplicity and dispersion of active centers in this field

and numerous and inaccessible sources by a mere scientific intention and far from any kind of social, political, tribal and personal prejudices and currents, based on performing a project in the shape of (management of produced and published works from all Shia centers) tries to provide a rich and free collection of books and research papers for the experts, and helpful contents and discussions for the educated generation and all classes of people interested in reading, with various formats in the .cyberspace

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:Appreciation

We would appreciate the centers, institutes, publications, authors and all honorable .friends who contributed their help and data to us to reach the holy goal we follow

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